Facultade de Filoloxía
Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas
Traballo de Fin de Grao

Violence as an Escape for Women In 20th Century American Drama

Autora: Olalla Rubines Chisca

Titora: Patricia Fra López

Xullo 2020

Traballo de Fin de Grao presentado na facultade de Filoloxía da Universidade de Santiago de Compostela para a obtención do Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesa no curso académico 2019/2020.

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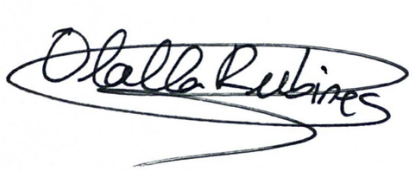

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Título: Violence as an escape for women in 20th Century American Drama

Resumo:

This dissertation will consist on a study of the treatment of Violence in North American plays written by women in the early 20th Century, providing an account of different types of violence according to authors such as Randall Collins (*Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory,* 2008) and explaining the differences and similarities on their treatment.

This analysis will focus on the literary text - and the film adaptation(s) if there are any – of three different plays: *Trifles*, a one-act play written by Susan Glaspell, originally performed in 1916; and two plays by Lillian Hellman: *The Children's hour* (1934) and *The Little Foxes* (1939).

The aim of this study is to identify how violence was tackled by several female playwrights and to determine whether or not we can find a pattern in their drama. In order to carry out this study, we will explain how violence is exerted and in which ways it represents the only visible escape for the main female characters.

Santiago de Compostela, 04 de Novembro de 2019.

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UNIVERSIDADE DE SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA

For mum.

Omissions are not accidents.
Marianne Moor

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Introduction

On May 2019 I had the chance of analysing Dennis Kelly's play *Girls and Boys* (2018) as part of a Contemporary Writing Paper that I took during the Easter Term of my Erasmus exchange. This is a work in which the only character onstage is a woman who retells the series of events that led to meeting her husband, marrying him, having children, getting divorced and eventually finding out that her now ex-husband had murdered her son and daughter. In that analysis I decided to tackle the topic of violence applied to the different characters, from the little boy who bullies her sister to the main character's husband who abused her psychologically and physically. On writing this essay I came across Randall Collins' work on violence titled *Violence. A micro-sociological Theory* (2008), in which he dissected and explained all kinds of violence and its contexts: domestic violence, war, bullying, violence in sports, street fights, and even the repercussions of 9/11.

It is from this work in particular that the idea of the violence spectrum arose and upon talking to my tutor we decided that it could be an interesting idea to apply it to early 20th century American women's theatre, more specifically Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* (1916), and Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* (1934) and *The Little Foxes* (1939) as well as the film adaptations of Hellman's plays, both of them directed by William Wyler. Comparing the plays to the adaptation has the purpose of determining to what extent was censorship applied by both the Production Code of Administration and the House of Un-American Activities committee, as I am aware happened to Tennessee Williams' homonymous adaptation of his play *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), which also deals with the topics of violence and (homo)sexuality in early 20th century America. The original sources for both *Trifles* and *The Children's Hour* will be analysed and

compared to the plays as well as the film versions of both Hellman's works taking into account the *Motion Picture Production Code of 1930* collected in Thomas Doherty's *Pre-Code Hollywood* (1999).

I chose to work on Glaspell and Hellman because one of the intentions of this dissertation is to find a diversity of lengths – Glaspell's play *Trifles* is an "one-act play" –, topics, characters and, most importantly, forms of violence. Black people's theatre as well as plays written by male playwrights are excluded due to different reasons: the analysis of drama written by black people entails an undividedly different approach based on race issues and historical background which I, as a white person, do not feel comfortable or well-informed to tackle, although it would be interesting to research about them in the future. On the other hand, male playwrights were excluded because I find particularly interesting the way in which women write about violence and also because there is not much bibliography available on these plays – especially on *The Little Foxes* –, and so presented an enjoyable challenge. Taking this last bit of information into account, this work should help enlarge the corpus on these authors and their plays, as well as present a different approach to women's theatre.

The following essay is divided into two chapters, the first provides a definition of violence taking into account previous ones such as Garver's (1968) and Pontara's (1978), as well as a classification of the types of violence that appear in the three aforementioned plays. Collins' (2008) typology of violence is the skeleton of this introductory chapter in which different forms of violence are defined and exemplified. The first form of violence that is explained is domestic violence, based on Collins' spectrum and Lanier and Maume's (2009) ideas about social isolation and its role on couple violence; then violence against the disabled is tackled as it will be particularly pertinent to *The Little Foxes*, Baladerian's (2009) comments on the topic will also be of relevance here. Bullying will

be applied to the plot of *The Children's Hour,* and it will be defined following Collins' commentaries on Montagner's bullying typology. Finally, at the end of the first chapter, both murder and suicide will be analysed as outcomes of violent situations, paying special attention to recent statistic drawn from *The Center for Disease Control and Prevention* and the World Health Organization as well as Baumeister's (1990) escape theory applied to suicide.

In the second chapter all this information will be condensed and applied to the analysis of the plays following a chronological order in *Trifles* (1916) Glaspell deals with murder, domestic violence, implicature, and the role of isolation in creating conditions in which these dreadful events are prone to take place; in *The Children's Hour* (1934) both bullying and suicide will be explored, and in *The Little* Foxes (1939) domestic violence and violence against the disabled will be delved into.

The aim of this work is to determine in which ways violence represents an escape for the female protagonists of the three plays: Minnie Wright in *Trifles*, Martha Dobie and Mary Tilford in *The Children's Hour*, and Regina Giddens in *The Little Foxes*, as well as finding a pattern in the use and description of violence by said characters and the playwrights.

Chapter 1

WHAT IS VIOLENCE?

"What is fundamental about violence is that a person is violated" (Garver 1968). Wolfgang Sofsky stated that violence "is inherent to culture. The latter bears the seal everywhere of death and violence… Violence itself is a product of human culture, a result of cultural experience" (Sofsky in Ozieblo et al. 2012:1). The attempt of defining violence has been the ultimate goal of scholars, psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, and researchers who are interested in this field. This is because there are many kinds and forms of violence and each depends on different elements such as the perpetrator – the person exerting violence on others or him or herself–, the victim, the environment in which that situation takes place, the culture surrounding that violent act, and many other situational factors that need are to be taken into account. Questions of race, class, education, background have to be considered in each instance of violence, and therefore, a case of domestic violence that involves a wealthy, young, heterosexual couple who does not have any children, in which the man is the perpetrator and his wife is the victim, differs greatly from a similar situation involving an equally young, wealthy, heterosexual couple that does have children. Moreover, violence can arise from the unchecked power given to government-funded instrument as is the case with the many instances of police[1] brutality and misconduct that have taken place recently have proven: the recent murder of Mr George Floyd[2], a 46 year-old US citizen, at the hands of two policemen in the city of Minnesota on May 25th when "[officer] Derek Chauvin, 44, pressed his knee down

[1] For more information and evidence on police brutality: https://www.nytimes.com/topic/subject/police-brutality-misconduct-and-shootings

[2] On George Floyd: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/26/us/minneapolis-police-man-died.html?searchResultPosition=2

onto Mr. Floyd's neck for more than eight minutes until he was no longer moving" (Oppel and Baker 2020). This action gave rise to a series of protests throughout the country under the motto of Black Lives Matter which, at the time this dissertation is being written, are still taking place. Furthermore, violence if present among the military, an institution that trains young men and women to go to war – a global-scale violent confrontation –. All in all, this great variety of elements have made the task of defining violence almost impossible, but despite the difficulty, there have been countless attempts to do so, and in the following lines some of those definitions will be summarised.

The definition quoted at the beginning of this section, in Newton Garver's article "What Violence Is" – and later on Pontara – fail to consider psychological violence. Garver's research has been regarded by scholars as being too broad because "if violence is violating a person or a person's rights, then every social wrong is a violent one" (Betz 1975:341); moreover, it does not take into account the possibility of violence being directed towards a group of people as happens in wars, or for it to be non-physical, what is called *psychological violence*. Another definition of violence can be found in Pontara (1978): "Violence is any action, performed as part of a method of struggle, which involves the intentional infliction of death or physical injury upon an unwilling victim by means of physical force". This second definition, although more specific than Garver's, also fails to consider psychological violence, even the definition the Oxford English Dictionary provides only refers to *physical* violence: "1.a. The deliberate exercise of physical force against a person, property, etc.; physically violent behaviour or treatment". Taking all this into consideration, a proper definition of violence would be the one that Pontara (1978) provides in section D4 of his essay "The Concept of Violence": "An action, […] performed by an agent P (person or group) as part of a method of struggle […] in a

situation of conflict […]". Albeit broad, this definition is closer to what it is found in the three plays that are going to be analysed in the following chapter.

This being said, it can be concluded that an act of violence is an attack directed to something or someone, whether it is oneself or someone else, whether it is a child, adult, or elderly person; and it can appear in various forms and shapes, it could be said that the different forms of violence can be found in a spectrum (Fig. 1). There is usually a process leading up toward physical violence which starts with verbal – or non-physical – violence, situated at the left of a spectrum. Towards the right, the more brutal the acts of violence are. R. Collins (2008) provides the categories which will be placed in said spectrum: on the far left can be found what he calls "Normal Limited Conflict", consisting on arguing and maybe shoving. Usually, cases of domestic violence start at this stage and escalate from here. At the centre of the spectrum, there is "Severe Forward Panic", which he illustrates with an anecdote of a babysitter causing severe burnings on a baby because the water of the bath was too hot and the infant would not stop crying in pain, she could not read those signals and kept the baby under the stream: in a moment of panic she moved forward. On the far right of this spectrum of violence, one can find what Collins calls "Terroristic Torture Regime", which would be the most severe and destructive type of violence. These last two types are instances of physical violence, what differentiates them is the fact that "Severe Forward Panic" consists on a violent act that only happens once in the heat of a discussion whereas a "Terroristic Torture Regime" implies the systematic assertion of physical violence.

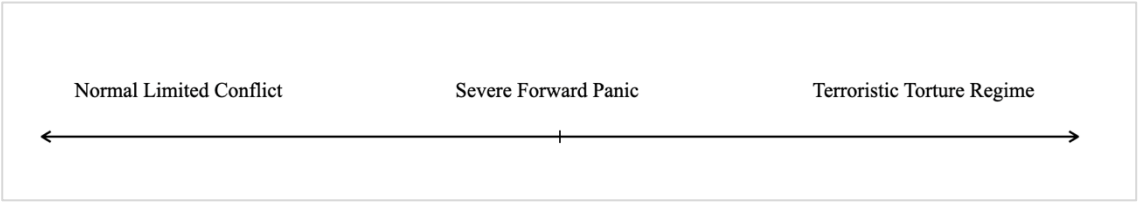

Figure 1. Violence spectrum.

Several forms of violence follow this spectrum, but the focus will be on those that are present in Susan Glaspell's one-act play *Trifles* (1916), and Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* (1934) and *The Little Foxes* (1939). In these plays – and films –, we can see domestic violence, violence against the disabled, and bullying, as well as murder and suicide, which are the violent outcome of violent actions.

Domestic violence

Randall Collins explains two kinds of domestic or family violence: the first one is called "common couple violence", it is frequent, normally practised by both males and females, and takes the form of "routine quarrels, raised voiced and heated expressions" (sic) (Collins 2008: 141), that would situate this type of violence in the far left side of the aforementioned spectrum (Fig. 1). This first type of family violence is prone to become more physical, "escalating to slapping, shoving and grabbing" (Collins 2008: 141). The second type of family violence is "intimate terrorism", a type of violence used for control that involves "serious physical injury or an ongoing atmosphere of threats; perpetrators are chiefly males, their victims chiefly females" (Collins 2008: 141). This "intimate terrorism" can further develop into "the pattern of situational tension and sudden release that leads to the violent overkill of forward panics or to ongoing torture" (Collins 2008:143), what has been identified with the term Terroristic Torture Regime, situated in the far right of the violence spectrum.

Collins exemplifies these instances of violence with three anecdotes, the first one is the aforementioned episode of a babysitter scalding a child's hand, "this case is short and episodic, with no apparent background, a sudden forward panic" (Collins 2008: 145). He then moves on to retell the account of a ten-year-old girl who witnessed a fight between her parents that started as a verbal confrontation to then move on to physical

violence when the child's father started "kicking [her mother] in the arm and legs" (Collins 2008: 145), this girl recounts being familiar with these situations because it had happened before. This physical fight dominated by the man is an example of the "hot emotional rush" (Collins 2008: 146) characteristic of forward panics. The third and last example presents a different scenario that is "colder [and] repetitive" (Collins 2008: 146) characteristic of Terroristic Torture Regimes: a woman had been living with her male partner for twelve years and whenever he became inebriated, he started by doubting her fidelity and the violent situation escalated from there:

> Bill would call her names, insults would escalate to physical shovings or holdings to demonstrate superior power […]. More recently, the threats of abuse were accompanied by the presence of a large hunting knife. The knife had been held at Barbara's throat, and Bill had pricked her chest with it on more than one occasion. (Collins 2008: 146-147)

At one point, after a visit to her therapist, the woman decides to take action and change the abusive pattern and does so successfully. However, "women who fight back risk escalation to more severe violence" (Collins 2008: 147). The alternative to fighting back would be to surrender applying Blau's principle: "the person with a weaker exchange position can compensate by subservience" (Blau 1964 in Collins 2008: 147).

Domestic violence is sometimes linked to isolation, and Collins describes it as one of the "usual suspects for causing domestic violence" alongside "poverty, stress [and] life transitions" (Collins 2008:137), as it will be exemplified in *Trifles*. Lanier and Maume (2009) explain how isolation and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) are connected in relation of the location it is committed, differentiating the rural areas and the more urban spaces. In their article they "examine how social isolation […] may contribute to violence among intimates" (Lanier and Maume 2009:1312) and collect several definitions of social

isolation, the first one by Fischer (1976), who defines it as "a sense of loneliness or rejection by others" (Fischer in Lanier and Maume 2009:1313); and the second one by Wilson (1987), who defined social isolation as "the lack of contact or of sustained interaction with individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society" (Wilson in Lanier and Maume 2009:1313).

In their comparison of IPV and social isolation in rural and urban areas, Lanier and Maume (2009) bring about the Social Disorganization Theory, which is based on "the view of a community as an ecological organism, where survival hinges on the interdependence of its social institutions" (Lanier and Maume 2009:1313). It is defined as "the inability of a local community to regulate itself in order to attain goals that are agreed to by the residents of that community" (Bursik 1988:535). The Social Disorganization Theory is deeply related to the human ecology model that Park and Burgess (1925) presented in which they proposed that "the coordination of social institutions within communities was a key factor in the differential rates of juvenile delinquency across urban neighborhoods" (Lanier and Maume 2009:1313). In this model, crime is seen as "a necessary outcome of the failure of community organizations" (Lanier and Maume 2009:1313). According to these definitions and theories that describe rural areas and households as being isolated in two senses: geographical, "which has implications for intensifying the hidden nature of the violence itself and mitigating efforts to both seek and provide help" (Lanier and Maume 2009:1316); and sociocultural, because "rural family life, gender roles, and patriarchal ideology generate acute forms of sociocultural isolation that render rural women particularly vulnerable to battering and passive policing" (Websdale in Lanier and Maume 2009:1316). This means that the lack of resources and services available create a further problem for women from rural areas

who suffer IPV because they have less chances of receiving immediate aid than women who live in urban areas.

Violence against the disabled

Studies show that victims of abuse are "especially likely to be handicapped or chronically ill" (Lau and Kosberg 1979; Pillemer and Finkelhor 1988; Sprey and Mathews 1989; Garbarino and Gilliam 1980 in Collins 2008: 137). These types of abusive relationships tend to begin as an altruistic gesture of charity from the caregiver towards the disabled person and will eventually develop into a situation of "anger and resentment on both sides" (Collins 2008: 138). On the one hand, the caregiver may feel stressed "especially when she (the majority of caregivers are female) has full-time responsibilities for care […]" (Collins 2008: 138) – even more so taking into account that "the perpetrator is often in a position of authority" (Baladerian 2009:155) – or because the person she is taking care of becomes too demanding by "increasing whining, calling for aid, or perhaps dramatic displays of distress" (Collins 2008: 138). On the other hand, the disabled person may become "suspicious of the avowed altruism of the caretaker whose aid is given in an annoyed or hostile tone; statements in the vein of 'look at all I've done for you'" (Collins 2008: 138).

Moreover, there are several elements to be taken into account in a situation of abuse involving a caretaker and its patient, for example, whether the caretaker has help at her disposal or not, since having several people taking care of the same person means that "the social weakness of the patient is reduced at the same time that stress on the caregiver is reduced" (Collins 2008: 138), thus creating a situation less prone to violence because both of them have the chance to rest and interact with different people. Furthermore, another aspect to take into consideration when analysing these types of

relationships is money, because "abusive caregivers are more likely to be financially dependent on the [disabled] person" (Pillemer 1993 in Collins 2008: 139).

When the stress on both parts becomes unbearable, and the conditions are suitable – "notably, a sealed-off location" (Collins 2008: 139) – the situation might escalate to the point of physical abuse in which "the caretaker can fall back on physical force with impunity." (Collins 2008: 138). The circumstances would become a torment for the patient and "emotionally it may have the quality of an enclosed hell for the abuser as well" (Collins 2008: 139)

"The domestic violence community is slowly recognizing the devastating effects of domestic violence involving individuals with disabilities" (Baladerian 2009:153), which means that ever since the concept of "domestic violence" was brought up, it did not consider a different type of violence that is only directed to disabled victims. This is the reason why the definition of domestic violence "needs to be extended to match the lived realities and cultural differences that exist within the disability community" (Baladerian 2009:154). Moreover,

> […] the types of domestic violence people with disabilities experience can also be more wide ranging, as such actions as withholding necessary medications or refusing to help a person with a physical disability to get out of bed also count as domestic abuse for people with disabilities (Baladerian 2009:154)

Among those types of violence there are accounts of sexual abuse, "physical assault, verbal and emotional abuse, and financial exploitation, with neglect being the most common form of abuse" (Baladerian 2009:155). Additionally, there are certain abusive behaviours that the caregiver can adopt to harm an individual with a physical disability, such as "withholding food, water, or medication, or withholding access to a wheelchair" (Baladerian 2009:155).

Bullying

> Bullying is […] conceptualized as an ongoing social tie of repetitive dominance and subordination. It is not a one-shot incident, but an expectable, locally institutionalized pattern. Such ongoing relationships include mocking […]; exclusion from sociability; stealing […]; and beating. (Collins 2008: 158)

Bullying is the most frequent kind of violence directed to the weak and is "most common among children" (Collins 2008: 156). A study on the context of bullying in French crèche centres carried out by Montagner et al. (1988) concluded that children fall into five main types: "popular dominants", "sociable and appeasing", "aggressive", "fearful victims", and "aggressive and dominated" (Montagner et al. 1988 in Collins 2008: 156). The children that fall into the first category are described as "social, but also threatening and appeasing" (Collins 2008: 156); they interact with other children in a cheerful way, but they are also competitive. Sociable and appeasing children are non-competitive and tend to avoid conflict, and they establish "network ties […] with the popular dominants" (Collins 2008: 156). The third kind, aggressive children, "are constantly competing with other children and trying to dominate them" (Collins 2008: 156), they associate with other bullies thus creating "little bully gangs" (Collins 2008: 156) and target the fearful victims, who are "timid and cry easily" (Collins 2008: 156). Lastly, the aggressive and dominated children "are typically network isolates" (Collins 2008: 157).

In addition to these five types, Montagner et al. have identified two others: type *A* consist of "fluctuating personalities, going through all of the aforementioned types" (Collins 2008: 158) who establish ties with the bullies; and type *B*, "isolated: these

children are non-sociable, non-aggressive, and non-appeasing" (Collins 2008: 158) (Fig. 2).

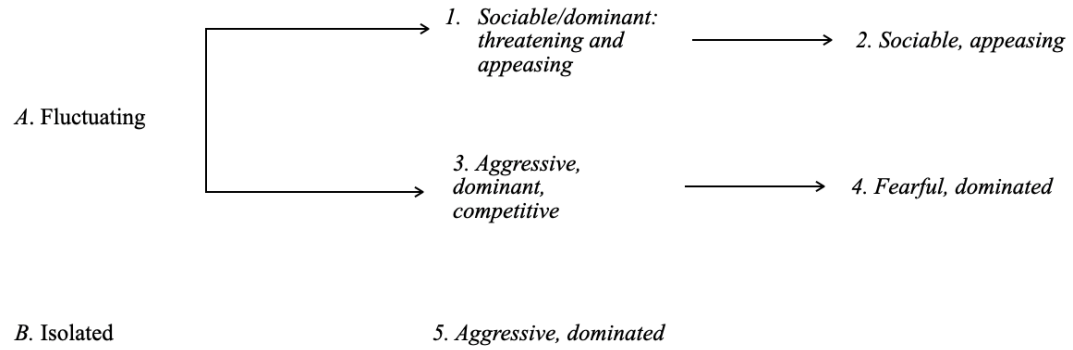

Figure 2. Bullying in Pre-School Networks. From Collins 2008:157[3]

The most widespread form of bullying is verbal violence in the form of insults and name-calling and "the more extreme practices of bullying – stealing and physical violence – are more often found among boys than girls […] [girls] are more active in malicious gossiping and spreading rumours" (Collins 2008: 159). This type of violence among children is most fruitful in total institutions, which are "closed communities, cut off from the surrounding world, in which most aspects of life are carried out in common" (Goffman 1961 in Collins 2008: 165). Some examples of total institutions would be prisons, boarding schools and summer camps. In closed systems like these, any connection with parents and home is excluded thus creating a "goldfish bowl" (Collins 2008: 166) in which all social interaction is confined to the same spaces and people: "there is no escape" (Collins 2008: 166). These terms and definitions will be taken into account and explored in the analysis of Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* (1934) applied to the character of Mary Tilford.

Murder and Suicide

[3] This table is originally found in Collins (2008:157) but it has been adapted to fit the size of the page.

"Murder is one of the two most common forms of intentional homicide, defined simply as the killing of one human being by another; the other is war" (Lane 1997:1). It can be the outcome of a hot Forward Panic or the consequence of a Terroristic Torture Regime, whether it is one or the other, it is ultimately a violent practice that consists on taking a person's life, it is "the deliberate and unlawful killing of a human being" (OED).

Throughout history, scholars have come across many cases of murder, whether it is in a large-scale conflict as wars, or as the outcome of a family feud. Another common scenario in which murders are found is within spousal violence. The *Centre for Disease Control and Prevention* defines domestic violence as "physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression (including coercive acts) by a current or former intimate partner" (*CDC* in Huecker et al.). Studies show that "1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men will experience physical violence by their intimate partner at some point during their lifetimes […]. Intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and stalking are high, with intimate partner violence occurring in over 10 million people each year" (Huecker et al.). However, in the US statistics show that "U.S. women kill their husbands almost as often as the reverse" (Wilson and Daly 1992: 206). However, and despite the statistics, the causes for murder in the domestic sphere differ, depending on whether the perpetrator is the husband or the wife, because "women kill male partners after years of suffering physical violence, after they have exhausted all available sources of assistance, when they feel trapped, and because they fear for their own lives" (Wilson et al. 1992: 206).

Suicide also consists on taking someone's life; yet, this practice, as opposed to murder, is directed to the self. The World Health Organization provides data regarding suicide rates across the globe: "close to 800 000 people die due to suicide every year, which is one person every 40 seconds […] for each adult who died by suicide there may have been more than 20 others attempting suicide". Moreover, the American Foundation

for Suicide Prevention states that only in 2017, 47173 Americans died by suicide, making it the 10th leading cause of death in the US.

The Freudian view on suicide explains that people who commit suicide do so instead of murdering someone else, this theory "emphasizes that it is another's faults that prompted the original murderous impulses, which are then redirected toward the self" (Baumeister, 1990: 105). Nietzche, on the other hand, wrote of suicide as the "free death", "arguing that the ability to choose death was one of the characteristic features of the superman" (Bauer 2017: 40). Other theories, like the "escape theory", regard this act as a form of escaping, of leaving one's self behind, escaping "from meaningful awareness of certain symbolic interpretations or implications about the self" (Baumeister, 1990: 90). The escape theory was developed by Roy Baumeister taking into account Baechler's findings, who saw suicide as "one means of solving problems" (Baumeister, 1990: 91).

The escape theory consists of six steps (Baumeister, 1990: 91). First, the person experiences that the circumstances that he or she is going through do not meet their expectations; second, "internal attributions are made, so that these disappointing outcomes are blamed in the self and create negative implications about the self" (Baumeister, 1990: 90). Thirdly, the individual enters an estate of self-awareness after comparing him or herself with a standard, thus feeling "inadequate, incompetent, unattractive, or guilty" (Baumeister, 1990: 90). Then "negative affect" arises from said comparison, and then the individual "responds to this unhappy estate by trying to escape […] into a numb estate of cognitive deconstruction" (Baumeister, 1990: 91). However, this fifth step may not be fulfilled successfully and so the person will seek "stronger means of terminating those aversive thoughts and feelings" (Baumeister, 1990: 91). Lastly, the consequences of this new and "deconstructed mental estate include a reduction of inhibitions, which may contribute to an increased willingness to attempt suicide"

(Baumeister, 1990: 91). All in all, these six steps show that the individual will suffer from unfulfilled expectations to the point of seeking an escape from their problems and a estate unhappiness through suicide.

Scholars have taken a look at the causes of suicide to determine what may lead the person to the aforementioned estate of unhappiness. One of the groups that scholars and psychologists have been regarding in recent years is suicide among members of the LGB community, especially of homosexual people, some argue that these cases are "markers of the potentially lethal force of heteronormative ideals and expectations […]" (Bauer 2017: 37). Authors like Hirschfeld ascribe homosexual suicide to "unrequited love" (Hirschfeld in Bauer 2017: 47), however, as Bauer points out,

> "[…] homosexual suicide should not be seen as a voluntary act but as the product of social rejection and legal persecution, caused by feelings of upset about the negative status of homosexuality and its persecution and a pronounced fear if blackmail and scandal." (Bauer 2017: 47)

Homosexual men and women do not decide to take their lives because of their sexual orientation, but because of "the false judgement passed on them by themselves and others" (Hirschfeld in Bauer 2017: 47).

Chapter 2

APPLYING THEORY

This section is devoted to the application of the theory developed in Chapter 1 to three plays: Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* (1916), and Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* (1934) and *The Little Foxes* (1939). These plays all have in common the use of violence by the female characters to achieve a goal, in these particular cases, that goal can be called independence or freedom and it ultimately represents an escape for them.

2. 1 Implicature and murder in *Trifles*

> It is a broken record of the worst kind – the needle caught in the groove of an old-fashioned vinyl record so the same segment of the tune is played again and again. (Collins 2008: 147)

Susan Keating Glaspell (1876 Davenport, Iowa - 1948 Provincetown, Massachusetts) wrote about the same strange case of murder a total of three times: the first one in "The Hossack Case", the original source of the play; later in the play *Trifles*; and lastly, in the short story *A Jury of her* Peers.

In the year 1900, Susan Glaspell was working as a news reporter in *Des Moines Daily News*, in Iowa, and she was sent to the city of Indianola to cover "the murder of a sixty-year old farmer named John Hossack on December 2 […]" (Ben-Zvi 1992: 143). Mr Hossack had been "struck twice on the head with an axe while he slept in bed" (Ben-Zvi 1992:144), at first it was assumed it had been a prowler who had committed the crime but the murder weapon had been discovered in the Hossack's property and, as none of

the family's possessions had been stolen, Mrs Hossack had been arrested as prime suspect. The trial began "on 1 April 1901 and was held every day except Sundays for the next ten days" (Ben-Zvi 1992:149). On April 11, 1901, "Margaret Hossack was found guilty as charged and was sentenced to life imprisonment at hard labor" (Ben-Zvi 1992:151). Glaspell became a central element in the shaping of public opinion about Mr Hossack's wife after she was accused of murdering her husband.

This was the last story Glaspell ever covered for *Des Moines Daily News*, as "immediately after the trial, she resigned and returned home to Davenport to begin writing fiction" (Ben-Zvi 1992:151), and in the summer of 1901, she enrolled in the graduate English program at the University of Chicago. However, the Hossack case was not over, and in 1902, "the Supreme Court of the State of Iowa agreed to hear [Margaret Hossack's] case" (Ben-Zvi 1992:151), and so a new trial was requested. Said second trial took place in February 1903, in Madison County and "this time the jury, […] was unable to reach a verdict [and because] it would be a waste of taxpayers' money to ask a third jury to hear the case" (Ben-Zvi 1992:151, 152), Mrs Hossack was finally released.

Fifteen years after her first encounter with the Hossack Case, Susan Glaspell wrote the one-act play *Trifles*. In this short play, she retells the story of the Hossack family applying several small modifications which change the story completely: in the original account of the case it is said that John Hossack had been found with a bashed head, and the couple had nine children while in Glaspell's play John Wright is strangled and it is stated that they "never had any children around" (*Trifles* p.8), leading the audience to understand that they had none. Moreover, Glaspell adds the secondary plot of the dead canary and while in her account of the Hossack case she describes how Margaret Hossack's female neighbours did not have the chance to testify in the trial, she brings them the opportunity to be heard in *Trifles* and in *A Jury of her Peers*.

In 1916, Susan Glaspell returned to her last case as a news reporter and wrote the short play *Trifles*. The play *Trifles* starts in the "gloomy kitchen" (*Trifles* p.1) of an isolated farmhouse, this space has been "left without having been put in order – unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the bread-box, a dish-towel on the table – other signs of incompleted work" (sic) (*Trifles* p.1) that the male characters do not fail to point out, this space "sets the tragic mood of the play" (Ismael and Jassim 2018:2). "Things are broken, cold, imprisoning; they are also violent. 'Preserves' explode from lack of heat, a punning reminder of the casual relationship between isolation and violence" (Ben-Zvi 1992:154). Knowing that violence has the possibility of being exerted repeatedly and through a longer period of time in situations of social and geographical isolation, these introductory stage directions set the foundations for a story whose unifying thread is violence.

The first characters that are introduced in the stage directions are the Sheriff Mr Peters, the County Attorney Mr Henderson, and Mr Hale, a neighbour. The three of them are followed by the Sheriff's wife, Mrs Peters – "a slight wiry woman, a thin nervous face" (*Trifles* p.1)–, and Mrs Hale. The men are visiting the crime scene where John Wright was found after being strangled in his sleep with a rope, and the women are accompanying them, but never leaving the space of the kitchen. Women are "identified only by their surnames" (Ben-Zvi 1992:156) in this play, which illustrates the lack of freedom that marriage represents for them in Susan Glaspell's eyes. However, both Mrs Hale and Mrs Peters "seek to particularize Minnie, referring to her by both her first and her maiden name" (Ben-Zvi 1992:156). Susan Glaspell did particularize these female characters in the short story *A Jury of Her Peers* (1917), which is a re-telling of *Trifles* written in prose. The genre of this story allows for the author to introduce more commentary and backstory to her characters and so the reader learns that Mrs Hale's

name is actually Martha and that Mrs Peters' surname was Gorman "before Gorman went out and Peters came in" (*A Jury of Her Peers* p.1).

The Sheriff and Mr Hale are helping the County Attorney gather clues and valuable information by recounting the events of the previous day: Mr Hale had visited the Wright's household in hopes of being able to talk to John Wright, but he found Minnie instead, sitting on a rocking chair. He recalls her looking "queer" (*Trifles* p. 2), and after inquiring about the whereabouts of her husband, she tells him that John Wright is actually dead.

> HALE: [...] 'Can't I see John?' 'No' she says, kind o' dull like. 'Ain't he home?' says I. 'Yes' says she, 'he's home'. 'Then why can't I see him?' I asked her, out of patience. "Cause he's dead', [...] 'He died of a rope round his neck' (*Trifles* p.2)

After confirming that Mr Wright was indeed dead on his bed upstairs, Mr Hale continues interrogating Mrs Wright:

> HALE: [...] 'Who did this, Mrs Wright?' said Harry [...]. 'I don't know', she says. 'You don't know?' says Harry. 'No', says she. 'Weren't you sleeping in the bed with him?' says Harry. 'Yes', says she, 'but I was on the inside'. 'Somebody slipped a rope round his neck and strangled him and you didn't wake up?' (*Trifles* p.2)

This is a play that relies heavily on implicature– a statement that will apply to the short story *A Jury of Her Peers* as well –, meaning that it asks the reader or the audience to connect the dots with the information that Glaspell provides. The term "implicature" is defined by the *OED* as "a meaning that is implied contextually, but is neither entailed logically nor stated explicitly". H. P. Grice has defined implicature in pragmatic terms relating it to conversation, he even referred to it as "Conversational Implicature", which is defined as "any meaning or proposition expressed implicitly by a speaker in his or her utterance of a sentence which is meant without being part of what is said in the strict

sense" (Huang 2013:2). This idea that meaning can be inferred from conversation is remarkably present in this play, and the reader firmly believes that Minnie Wright is the one who killed John Wright after Mr Hale's aforementioned statement. Yet, were the implications not clear enough, the characters of Mrs Hale and Mrs Peters engage in a conversation in which they comment Mrs Wright's blameworthiness:

MRS HALE: Do you think she did it?

MRS PETERS: (*in a frightened voice*) Oh, I don't know.

MRS HALE: Well, I don't think she did. Asking for an apron and her little shawl. Worrying about her fruit. (*Trifles* p.5)

The audience suspects that Minnie Wright could have killed her husband, and as the action develops, it becomes clearer to the spectator that it was her who strangled the man. This is especially evident after learning about her dead canary – "the only thing that Minnie's husband could not possess" (Stobbs 2002:228) –, which John had killed the same way he died: with a rope around his neck, despite the fact that "there was a gun in the house" (*Trifles* p.5). The use of a rope, as opposed to the use of an axe – which Margaret Hossack presumably used in 1900 – or a gun represents a "dramatic correlative for revenge […]: a punishment to fit [John's] crime" (Ben-Zvi 1992:154). The cage and the dead bird that Mrs Hale and Mrs Peters find are not only a clue that leads the audience to believe that Mrs Wright killed her husband, they also "signify Wright's brutal nature and the physical abuse his wife has borne" (Ben-Zvi 1992:154). However, although these female characters assume that Mrs Wright is guilty, they also find a justification for her crime, they can empathise with her:

MRS HALE: She liked the bird. She was going to bury it in that pretty box.

MRS PETERS: (*in a whisper*) When I was a girl - my kitten - there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes - and before I could get there - (*covers her face*

an instant) If they hadn't held me back I would have - (*catches herself, looks upstairs where steps are heard, falters weakly*) - hurt him.

MRS HALE: (*with a slow look around her*) I wonder how it would seem never to have had any children around, (*pauses*) No, Wright wouldn't like the bird - a thing that sang. She used to sing. He killed that too. (*Trifles* p. 8)

Nevertheless, "instead of arguing [Minnie Wright and Margaret Hossack's] innocence, Glaspell concretizes the conditions under which these women live and the circumstances that might cause them to kill" (Ismael and Jassim 2018:2). By showcasing Mrs Wright's actions as justifiable through these two female characters, Glaspell seems to seek redemption for "her role in sensationalizing the proceedings and in shaping public opinion" (Ben-Zvi 1992:156) during the period of time that she covered the Hossack Case. The author seems to be giving the character of Minnie Wright the benefit of the doubt and support that Margaret Hossack was denied, for which Glaspell feels guilty. Instead of writing an argumentative essay to develop her ideas, the author has chosen the form of a play, in which two female characters draw conclusions and defend and empathise with Mrs Wright presenting their point of view to the audience.

Nevertheless, whereas Mrs Hale and Mrs Peters were able to identify Minnie Wright as the culprit, all three male characters onstage fail to do the same. They seem to have taken the quest of belittling, teasing and mocking the women that have accompanied them into the Wrights' house, while also overlooking the prime incriminatory element: Mrs Wright's sewing basket in which the dead canary was hidden. The Sheriff decides not to search the kitchen for clues since there were "nothing [there] but kitchen things" (*Trifles* p. 3); immediately after that statement, the County Attorney points out "here's a nice mess" (*Trifles* p. 3), referring to the untidy state of the shelves; and Mr Hale claims that "women are used to worrying over trifles" (*Trifles* p.3) when he learns that Mrs

Wright had expressed her concern over her preserves. It is in scenes like this where the audience can identify the great differences between the female and male characters, when "the men laugh, the women look abashed" (*Trifles* p.5); when the men make an unfortunate comment, women position themselves on the opposite side:

> COUNTY ATTORNEY: [...] Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?
>
> MRS HALE: (*stiffly*) There's a great deal of work to be done in a farm. [...]
>
> COUNTY ATTORNEY: Ah, loyal to your sex, I see [...]. (*Trifles* p.3)

Mrs Hale and Mrs Peters are not only defending Mrs Wright, but all women who are belittled for their seemingly uninteresting chores like, for example, sewing, or that are criticised for not being "much of a housekeeper" (*Trifles* p.3); "it is not Minnie's tragedy that is explored in the play, but all other oppressed women, living in similar situations" (Ismael and Jassim 2018:3). John Wright was the one who changed his wife's life for the worse since Minnie, before she became Mrs Wright, was a lively, kind and happy woman who "used to sing really pretty" in the choir (*Trifles* p.6) until her social ties were cut off and she became a prisoner in her own home:

> MRS HALE: [...] Did you know John Wright, Mrs Peters?
>
> MRS PETERS: Not to know him; I've seen him in town. They say he was a good man.
>
> MRS HALE: Yes - good; he didn't drink, and kept his word as well as most, I guess, and paid his debts. But he was a hard man, Mrs Peters. Just to pass the time of day with him - (*shivers*) Like a raw wind that gets to the bone, (*pauses, her eyes falling on the [bird] cage*) I should think she would'a wanted a bird. (*Trifles* p.7)

Violence coats this play, it flows both ways impregnating the actions of Mr and Mrs Wright. On the one hand, John Wright is a violent man who mistreated his wife; and Minnie Wright, which Mrs Hale describes as "kind of like a bird herself - real sweet and

pretty, but kind of timid and - fluttery" (*Trifles* p.7), takes revenge on her husband after having endured domestic violence in a situation of isolation in their farm, she put an end to a regime of systematic terroristic torture. She did so because "she was provoked by her husband killing the canary, and […] this caused a loss of control" (Stobbs 2002:239) that manifested in the form of a forward panic, in Collins' terminology. Their neighbour Mrs Hale even admits that she did not visit them often, demonstrating that Minnie's social ties were weak and solely reduced to her relationship with her abusive husband. The notion of *social ties* has been linked to mental well-being, as explained by Kawachi and Berkman (2001): "Human relations consist of multiple layers that extending [sic] out from the ego" (Kawachi and Berkman 2001:463). Said layers extend from close and "intimate relations […] outward to social networks […] and to weak ties consisting of involvement in community, voluntary, and religious organizations" (Kawachi and Berkman 2001:463). In the first group these authors include marital ties, whereas in the second group they include friends and close relatives, and they refer to the term *belongingness* as the sense of "general social identity, which sociological theorists have argued as being relevant for the promotion of psychological well-being" (Kawachi and Berkman 2001:463). It is that sense of belonging that was denied for Minnie Foster, both by her isolated environment and by the lack of social ties with neighbours and friends, which drives her to kill her husband.

Minnie's use of violence represents an escape for her because not only was she suffering a situation of ongoing torture perpetrated by her husband, but also because she was physically bonded to her house, with little to none connexion with her neighbours, friends or relatives. After killing her husband, she can finally be at peace knowing that she will no longer have to endure domestic violence, although her freedom comes at much a higher cost: she will now be isolated in a prison cell.

The treatment of violence in this play, and also in *A Jury of Her Peers*, is stablished not only through Minnie's murdering her husband and Mr Wright's mistreating his wife, but also through the ambience and environment that surrounds the characters and that contributes to their isolation, a factor which makes violence more brutal and systematic, turning it into torture regimes that can only be depleted when the person enduring violence takes violent action.

2.2 Bullying and suicide in *The Children's Hour*

> MARTHA (*as though she was talking to herself*) It's funny; it's all mixed up now. There's something in you, and you don't know it and you don't do anything about it. *Suddenly a child gets bored and lies* […] (*The Children's Hour* Act 3, p.72, italics mine except for stage directions).

Lillian Hellman's play *The Children's Hour* (1934) shares with *Trifles* not only the use of violence by the female characters to achieve a goal, but also the fact that both plays are based on real-life events. In the case of Hellman's play *The Children's Hour*, Mary Titus explains that it was based on a "nineteenth-century Scottish lawsuit, 'The Great Drumsheugh Case', recounted by William Roughead […]" (Titus 1991:216). Titus explains how Hellman "borrowed liberally from the lawsuit's characters and details" (Titus 1991:217) but decided to implement two changes of her own, being Martha's confession of her attraction for her friend Karen the most important and striking one; she also added the character of doctor Joseph Cardin, "thus reinforcing the heterosexuality of the surviving teacher" (Titus 1991:217).

The Drumsheugh Case took place in Edinburgh, in a selective all-girls school between the years 1809 and 1810. The school was being taken care of by two young teachers that were accused by one of their students of being in a homosexual relationship. The student who had done so finds her counterpart in the character of Mary Tilford in Hellman's play, and she had reported to her grandmother "that the two school mistresses had indulged in 'inordinate affection' for each other" (*Edinburgh Evening News*). It is not clear today whether they were in an actual, secret relationship or whether their student

had devised that idea herself, but damage had been inflicted and, according to Edinburgh Evening News, both teachers were forbidden from teaching in Edinburgh again.

Lillian Hellman gathered this information that William Roughead gave an account of, and in 1934 she published *The Children's Hour,* narrating the series of unfortunate events that take place after a child – Mary Tilford – lies to her grandmother about a supposed relationship between her two female teachers, one of which perfectly summarizes said events to her aunt Mrs Mortar:

> MARTHA: […] Karen Wright and Martha Dobie brought a libel suit against a woman called Tilford because her grandchild had accused them of having what the judge called "sinful sexual knowledge of one another." […] a great part of the defense's case was based on remarks made by Lily Mortar, actress in the toilets of Rochester, against her niece, Martha. And a greater part of the defense's case rested on the telling that Mrs. Mortar would not appear in court to deny or explain those remarks. […] we lost the case. (*The Children's Hour* Act 3, p.63)

This play opens with Portia's soliloquy in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* in which she argues about justice and the attributes of mercy amidst Shylock's trial:

> PORTIA: The quality of mercy is not strained,
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest,
> It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
> 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes
> The thronèd monarch better than his crown.
> His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
> The attribute to awe and majesty,

Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;

But mercy is above this sceptred sway […] (*The Merchant of Venice* IV.I.181-190)

It is not accidental that the girls are reading this particular scene from this particular play, as it is a monologue that talks about mercy and justice, about how being forgiving and merciful can improve one's life. Hellman also explores the topic of (in)justice in *The Children's Hour*, allowing the audience to witness the destructive consequences of a judicial system that condemns a person's nature. The two young teachers Karen Wright and – especially – Martha Dobie are judged by holding a non-existent relationship, by their presumed homosexual nature; Shylock was judged the same way for being a Jew. Furthermore, in both plays these characters are humiliated and punished: Shylock loses his belongings in favour of Antonio and Bassanio, whereas Martha Dobie loses her life and, therefore, her identity and nature. Her identity, however, was unknown to her; towards the end of the play she reflects on how she did not think about whether her feelings for Karen went further than friendship until she is forced to consider it. The lie that ruined their lives sprung from the reading of a book titled *Mademoiselle Du Maupin*, an erotic, epistolary novel from 1835 written by French author Théophile Gautier that examines "a world that involves cross-dressing, sexual ambiguity, and homoerotic love" (Karyn Johnson, 2007). Said novel will be the spark that lights the prairie that is Mary Tilford's imagination, it will be the source of information for her accusations against her teachers and she will involve as many of her classmates as possible in her lie.

Mary is a young girl of "twelve to fourteen years old" (*The Children's Hour* Act 1, p.5), and, as such, she both dislikes school and is inevitably involved in the social pyramid of school life, her position being on top of it. It has been explained above how

children in schools, daycare centres, youth centres and boarding schools – as in this case – fall into different categories depending on their relationships with each other. It has been stablished that those categories are popular dominants, sociable and appeasing, aggressive, fearful victims, and aggressive and dominated. Mary Tilford could be described as either "popular dominant" or "aggressive", although she seems to fit better on the first category because she does not "associate chiefly with [other bullies], in little bully gangs" (Collins 2008:156); popular dominant kids can also behave aggressively, but they will regain their composure when they get what they want: "after they win they are friendly" (Collins 2008:156). Mary Tilford, for example, decides that she will run away from the school, and physically harms Peggy into giving her the money that she had been saving for months so as to pay for a cab and the bus to go to her grandmother's house:

> MARY: Go upstairs and get me the money.
>
> PEGGY: (*hysterically, backing away from her*) I won't. I won't. I won't.
>
> (MARY *makes a sudden move for her, grabs her left arm, and jerks it back, hard and expertly,* PEGGY *screams softly.* EVELYN *tries to take* MARY'S *arm away. Without releasing her hold on* PEGGY*,* MARY *slaps* EVELYN'S *face.* EVELYN *begins to cry.*)
>
> MARY: Just say when you've had enough.
>
> PEGGY: […] All-all right-I'll get it.
>
> (MARY *smiles, nods her head […]*) (*The Children's Hour* Act 1, p.30)

It is not only Peggy and Evelyn who suffer Mary's wrath; Rosalie is blackmailed throughout the play because she stole one of her friends' bracelet and Mary is the only one who knew it. She then uses that information to coerce her into taking part on her lie, the truth hanging over Rosalie's head like the sword of Damocles; the first time, Mary

uses that information to make Rosalie take an oath to become "the vassal of Mary Tilford and [to do] and say whatever she tells [her]" (*The Children's Hour* Act 2, Scene II, p.43). The second time Mary bullies Rosalie is to actively make her part of her lie: her cousin Joe Cardin had given her the opportunity to redeem herself and tell the truth, but she aggravated the situation by telling her grandmother that "it was Rosalie who saw them. [Mary] just said it was [her] so [she] wouldn't have to tattle on Rosalie" (*The Children's Hour* Act 2, Scene II, p.55). When asked, Rosalie tells the truth: she did not say nor saw anything, yet, Mary helps her "remember":

> MARY (*staring at her, speaks very slowly*) Yes you did, Rosalie. You're just trying to get out of it. I remember just when you said it. I remember it, because it was the day Helen Burton's bracelet was […] stolen, and nobody knew who did it, and Helen said that if her mother found out, she'd have the thief put in jail. […]
>
> ROSALIE: (*with a shrill cry*) Yes. Yes. I did see it. I told Mary. What Mary said was right. I said it […] (*The Children's Hour* Act 2, Scene II, p.57)

Nevertheless, it is not only children that Mary manipulates, the first time she appears on the scene she brings Mrs Mortar some flowers – an otherwise innocent gesture –, but Karen Wright asks her where she took those flowers from, the girl lies to her and says that she took them "near Conway's field", however, "it wasn't necessary to go so far. There was a bunch exactly like [that] in the garbage can [that] morning" (*The Children's Hour* Act 1, p.11). Mary also tried to convince her teachers and her cousin that she was having a heart attack, but they did not believe her. Furthermore, her cousin Joe Cardin is sceptical about her words, he does not fully believe her, both signs that they are used to dealing with her tendency to lying. Not even Agatha, Mrs Tilford's help, can be fooled by Mary's deceptions:

AGATHA: Don't think you're fooling me, young lady. You might pull the wool over some people's eyes, but – I bet you've been up to something again. (*The Children's Hour* Act 2, Scene I, p.32).

All in all, these characters seem not to bend to Mary's wishes, however, Mrs Tilford does. The elderly woman seems to avoid believing her granddaughter's cries, but eventually caves in and humours her because the child manipulates her. Mary uses physical affection and brings back childhood memories to remind Mrs Tilford of how much she loves her, she plays with the idea that her grandmother is being harsh with her because she does not love her anymore thus manipulating the elder lady's emotions:

MRS. TILFORD: […] You'll have to go back to school after dinner.

MARY: But – (*she hesitates, then goes up to MRS. TILFORD and puts her arms around the older woman's neck. Softly*) How much do you love me?

Through her charm, Mary is able to convince her grandmother to let her stay in her house for dinner, and manages to intrigue her long enough so as to let her know about the conversation her friends Peggy and Evelyn heard between Mrs Mortar and Martha about how "she was jealous of Miss Wright marrying Cousin Joe" and how it was "unnatural for [Martha] to feel that way" (*The Children's Hour* Act 2, Scene I, p.37). Luckily for her, Mrs Tilford believes the accusations she makes and starts making phone calls to all the parents to inform them of the rumours and urging them to withdraw their children from the Wright-Dobie School for girls.

That little lie Mary told her grandmother to get out of school for a while was the beginning of the misery for the two teachers: they had to face a lawsuit for their behaviour and fell into debt because of that. Furthermore, having no children at their school meant that they were now unemployed and had no income to keep the school afloat. They feel like they do not have a purpose anymore and their environment reflects that: the living

room of the school is “dark and uncared for” and the “windows are shut, the curtains tightly drawn” (*The Children’s Hour* Act 3, p.58). This great scandal, like the one that happened in the aforementioned Edinburgh school in 1810, both teachers, Martha and Karen, are being harassed, mocked and rejected by a community that used to respect them, however, instead of leaving the city, they lock themselves up in the school:

> KAREN: [Joe] says that we ought to go into town and go shopping and act as though –
>
> MARTHA: Shopping? That’s a sound idea. There aren’t three stores in Lancet that would sell us anything. Hasn’t he heard about the ladies’ clubs and their meetings and their circulars and their visits […]
>
> (A GROCERY BOY *appears lugging a box. He brings it into the room, stands staring at them, giggles a little […]*) (*The Children’s Hour* Act 3, p.60).

On top of that, Karen and Joe’s relationship comes to an end despite his attempts to improve the situation by suggesting the three of them – himself, Karen, and Martha – move to another city to leave their troubles behind. Nonetheless, Karen knows that they would not be happy, because the day the teachers lost the case “[she] was watching [his] face in court. It was ashamed, and sad at being ashamed […]” (*The Children’s Hour* Act 3, p.67). She then proceeds to explain how she could never ask him to keep on feeling that shame for the rest of his days because those rumours would follow her everywhere she went. Martha, on the other hand, decided to break ties with her aunt in a more aggressive manner by expressing her hatred for the woman – “I hate you. I’ve always hated you” – to which Mrs Mortar responds, “God will punish you for that” (*The Children’s Hour* Act 3, p. 63). And the punishment does come, not from above but from within. After sacking her aunt, Martha confesses to Karen that “*[she] has loved [her] the*

way they say" (*The Children's Hour* Act 3, p.71, original italics), her friend tries to deny it, but Martha insists:

> MARTHA: I've been telling myself that [I am guilty of nothing] since the night we heard the child say it; I've been praying I could convince myself of it. I can't, I can't any longer. It's there. I don't know how, I don't know why. But I did love you. I do love you. I resented your marriage; maybe because I wanted you; maybe I wanted you all along; maybe I couldn't call it by a name; maybe it's been there ever since I first knew you – (*The Children's Hour* Act 3, p.71).

It is at this moment that Martha's differences with Karen become abysmal and cannot be overcome, she realizes that she will never be accepted in the world she is living, she feels guilty for the damage she caused her friend because, although Mary Tilford did lie, her ideas had to be based on some truth. When faced with the inability to continue with her life and the prospect of years – decades even – of harassment and unhappiness, Martha decides not to wait for God to punish her and so she brings the punishment onto herself: "*[…] There is no sound in the house until, a few minutes after MARTHA'S exit, a shot is heard.* " (*The Children's Hour* Act 3, p.72, original italics). Bauer explains that homosexual suicide, and therefore, Martha's suicide "should not be seen as a voluntary act but as the product of social rejection and legal persecution, caused by feelings of upset about the negative status of homosexuality and its persecution […]" (Bauer 2017: 47). Suicide represents for her an escape from all the troubles she caused – and would cause – because of her attraction to women; she chooses death because staying alive would be a greater punishment, and although "suicide's a sin" (*The Children's Hour* Act 3, p.73), Martha takes that path towards freedom. It did not matter that Mrs Tilford arrived at the school explaining that "[she has] talked to Judge Potter. He will make all arrangements. There will be a public apology and an explanation. The damage suit will be paid to [Karen

and Martha] in full […]. [She] must see that [they] won't suffer anymore." (*The Children's Hour* Act 3, p.75). Although her intentions are admirable, it would have not made a difference, because Martha's realization of her sexuality would have stayed true: she would still be in love with her friend and not being able to freely love a woman would mean living a life of unhappiness and guilt and inevitably end in suicide.

This play explores the dichotomy inside versus outside, how Mary Tilford wanted to escape from the school when she did not feel comfortable as opposed to her teachers, who locked themselves up in that space, unable to leave. This is also applied to the characters themselves, especially Martha, since "the contemporary lesbian discourse deals with the dichotomy inside/outside the closet, that is to say, privacy/exposition. The private belongs to the realm of the inner world, the unknown, and the depths of the self." (Ledo 2006:167). She is forced to "come out", exposing her life to the public and being forced to face persecution and harassment by the community she once belonged to, "there is a clear example of a compulsory *exposition*: Martha is forced to make conscious her subconscious, opening the door of her private room to her community" (Ledo 2006:167, original italics). That is why they end up locked inside of the school, the inside and private represents what is comfortable and known, whereas the outside represents being accosted and recognized as "*un-natural*, *deviated*, *non-straight*, *different*, in the end, lesbians" (Ledo 2006:165).

This *exposition*, as Mónica Ledo calls it, as well as the aforementioned topics of lying, suicide, and guilt are also present in the 1961 adaptation for the big screen in the film *The Children's Hour* directed by William Wyler. The film is almost true to the text, some changes were made to adapt it to the language of the cinema: Mrs Tilford (Fay Bainter) is introduced at the beginning to present the main characters to the audience, the girls are playing piano instead of reading Shakespeare, and Mary Tilford (Karen Balkin)

is portrayed as even more annoying. However, the greatest difference comes in the way Martha (Shirley MacLaine) commits suicide: in the play she shoots herself, whereas in the film she hangs herself, and Karen (Audrey Hepburn) sees her hanging figure through the window while she was taking a walk. Committing suicide with a gun creates a more violent image of death than hanging oneself because this last method is "cleaner", which appears to be more fitting for Martha: the audience perceives her guilt and remorse, and shooting herself would create a gory mess. Moreover, by hanging herself, the director is able to be more suggestive and he can film evocative shots of the shadows in the room. Another major deviation from the play is the funeral that is held for Martha, not a word is said in this scene, whereas in the play, after Martha dies, the scene continues for three more pages in which Mrs Tilford apologises to Karen and she explains to her how it did not matter anymore, leaving the reader feeling uneasy because the play seems to finish with Martha's death, but it is lengthened to give Mrs Tilford a chance to make amends and to show that order is restored. At the end of the film Karen silently walks out of the cemetery with her head high and apologetic eyes following her, giving the audience a feeling of uneasiness not knowing what will happen to the surviving characters.

According to a set of rules and guidelines that filmmakers had to follow in their films called *The Motion Picture Production Code*, the film industry had the ability to morally influence the audience, and so, had moral obligations towards them, claiming that "law, natural or divine, must not be belittled, ridiculed, nor must be a sentiment created against it" (Doherty 1999:351), yet, in *The Children's Hour* law is being constantly challenged, not only the authority that both teachers represent, but also God's law, the Bible tells Catholics that "you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (*Exodus* 20:2-17), lying is a sin. Mary Tilford spends most of the play lying, she lies about her whereabouts at the beginning of the play, she lies about the relationship between her

teachers and she lies about protecting Rosalie, she is a sinner the same way Martha is for committing suicide – as Mrs Mortar puts it, "suicide's a sin" (*The Children's Hour* Act 3, p.73) – but also because of her homosexuality therefore, she had to die. As Mónica Ledo points out, "there was a general tendency to "murder the sinner" or *punish* him/her with a hard sentence […]. Martha Dobie decides not to caddy on the heavy load of shame as she commits suicide" (Ledo 2006:166-167, italics mine).

The idea of punishment is one that both the film and the play tackle in a very similar manner: Mrs Mortar talks about divine punishment when, after Martha confesses her hatred for her own aunt, she tells her that "God will punish you for that" (*The Children's Hour* Act 3, p. 63). Martha does end committing suicide, which has been stablished before as an act of punishing herself and, ironically, also a sin. The film could have changed the type of punishment, but she would *need* to be punished as "the audience of the 1960s was not prepared for the redemption of an abject in a film" (Ledo 2006:165), thus, by keeping suicide as punishment, Wyler tells the audience that Martha is aware of her sin, and demonstrates her shame by inflicting the punishment on herself. Mary Tilford, on the other hand, is not shown facing any sort of punishment neither in Hellman's play nor in the 1961 adaptation. It is true that in the film, her cousin Joseph Cardin spanks her once when she faints at school and he comes to inspect her, but that seems more disciplinary and driven by frustration than a serious punishment. This film represents violence and sinful behavior in a way that the industry should have not accepted, perhaps because the Motion Picture Production Code was already on its way to disappear with films like Billy Wilder's *Some Like it Hot* (1959) which dealt with cross-dressing and homosexuality, as well as Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) portraying explicit images of violence and sexuality, which led to the disappearance of *The Code* and its substitution with the film rating system that is still used nowadays.

Going back to the previous paragraph, suicide represents an escape for Martha, it is her liberation; in death she can finally find peace for herself and the people that surround her thus fulfilling Baumaister's predictions in the escape theory: she sees that the situation she is going through is far from ideal because she has just realized her sexuality in a place and time in which it is not accepted; she then blames herself for being "flawed". Thirdly, Martha enters a state of self-awareness after comparing herself with a standard – in this case her friend Karen Wright but any other heterosexual woman would be prone to comparison–, thus feeling "inadequate, incompetent, unattractive, or guilty" (Baumeister, 1990: 90). From this comparison she may try to respond by attempting to escape from her problems through suicide, and Hellman shows her success at escaping. Mary's incentive for escaping is more straightforward: she bullies everybody around her, first to escape from school and later on to get away from a lie that escalated to the point of ruining her teachers' lives.

2.3 Violence against the disabled in *The Little Foxes*

In the year 1939, Lillian Hellman wrote a play about the dangers of greed and how it can turn people into violent creatures who do not feel remorse. This is the case of Regina Giddens, the main character of *The Little Foxes* and an ambitious woman living a rather comfortable life in the south of the Unites States. She is presented as a resentful woman who envies her brothers, Oscar and Benjamin Hubbard, because they were able to inherit their father's wealth whereas she depends on her sick and unambitious husband, whom she ends up killing driven by her greed. The play opens at the Giddens' household, where the Hubbard siblings are having a conversation with a businessman from Chicago called William Marshall, "hoping to attract his Northern capital to establish a textile mill in their Alabama town" (Watson 1996:61). In this first act it is stablished the differences between the Hubbards – "the foxes of the play […] rapacious and unscrupulous, [who] easily crush the fragile Birdie", and Birdie, Oscar Hubbard's Wife, "the delicately nurtured flower of antebellum plantation society" (Watson 1996:62).

Violence appears in this play both as a side effect of greed in the case of Regina Giddens, and as a terroristic torture regime in the form of domestic violence. Birdie – "the only [member of the family] who belongs to the Southern aristocracy" (*The Little Foxes* Act 1, p.156) – is the victim of domestic violence at the hands of her husband Oscar Hubbard, Regina's brother; she is described as "a woman of about forty, with a pretty, well-bred, faded face" (*The Little Foxes* Act 1, p.152), she is a kind woman but also an alcoholic, as she is portrayed several times as such, for example, in Act 3 [page 202] she pours herself a total of four glasses of wine – "BIRDIE pours herself a glass of wine", "[BIRDIE] has drunk another glass of wine", "she finishes her glass, shakes her head",

"she pours a drink" – and when she does so she changes the subject because she was just about to start talking about her abusive husband:

> BIRDIE: [Oscar] said that music made him nervous. He said he just sat and waited for the next note. […] Ah, well – (*She finishes her glass, shakes her head. HORACE looks at her, smiles*) Your papa don't like to admit it, but he's been mighty kind to me all these years. […] Once he stopped Oscar from – (*She stops, turns. Quickly*) I'm sorry I said that. […] (*She pours a drink.*) (*The Little Foxes* Act 3, p.202)

What liberates Birdie is drinking, she becomes uninhibited and accidentally mentions the abuse she endures on the hands of her husband Oscar Hubbard, a man depicted as violent and ambitious. In the 1941 film adaptation of the play she confesses so in one of those moments in which she loses inhibition due to a copious intake of alcohol: "I've never had a headache, Zan. That's a lie they tell for me. I drink. All by myself, in my own room, by myself. I drink, and when they want to hide it they say 'Birdie's got a headache again'" (1:12:10). Oscar physically and psychologically abuses his wife, deliberately ignoring her in several occasions in favour of directing his undivided attention to his potential future business partner and enjoys hunting despite Birdie's attempts to compel him to abandon the activity: "I want you to stop shooting. […] I don't like to see animals and birds killed just for the killing." (*The Little Foxes* Act 1, p.164). He forces his wife to grow silent when she starts to bother him and lectures her whenever she behaves in a way he does not approve of – "You have had too much wine. Get yourself in hand now" (*The Little Foxes* Act 1, p.165); moreover, Oscar Hubbard physically abuses her: "*As BIRDIE quickly attempts to pass him, he slaps her hard, across the face*" (*The Little Foxes* Act 1, p.174), when asked by her niece Alexandra, she lies and tells her that she "only twisted [her] ankle" (Act 1, p.174). This violent behaviour

present in Oscar Hubbard can also be seen in their son Leo, "a young man of twenty" (*The Little Foxes* Act 1, p.153) whom Benjamin Hubbard plans on marrying off to Alexandra, an idea that Birdie disapproves of because she witnesses how violent her son has become:

> ALEXANDRA: (*whispering*) [Leo] beat the horses. That's why we were late getting back. […] He always beats the horses as if –
>
> BIRDIE: (*whispering frantically, holding ALEXANDRA'S hands*) He's my son. My own son. But you are more to me – more to me than my own child. […] You are *not* going to marry Leo. I am not going to let them do that to you – (*The Little Foxes* Act 1, p.173, original italics)

This is also accentuated in the film, the moment Birdie confesses that "[she doesn't] like Leo. [Her] very own son, and [she doesn't] like him" (1:12:00). Alexandra does not marry Leo, mainly because she expresses her desire to abandon her house and her mother at the end of the play to go "some place where people don't just stand around and watch" (*The Little Foxes* Act 3, p.225). Birdie can see that her situation is one of ongoing torture; knowing that there is nothing in her power that she can do to stop that, she drinks and helps Alexandra avoid a similar future. Birdie sees her young-self reflected in Alexandra, and in the 1941 adaptation of the play, she even estates that "in twenty years [Alexandra] will be just like [her]" (1:13:30), meaning that she will find herself forced into a loveless marriage where she will struggle to find some sort of escape.

On the other hand, Regina Giddens is a character that also exerts violence on her partner; her husband Horace is a "tall man of about forty-five" with a "tired and ill" face (*The Little Foxes* Act 2, p.182). He is a sick man who suffers from a heart condition and needs help carrying through simple daily tasks. He was recovering in a hospital in Baltimore until Regina sent her daughter Alexandra to retrieve him and bring him back

to their house, so that she could persuade him in person to give her the money that she needs to take part in her brothers' ambitious business plan. And so he returns to his home in a very sick state, "he rises with difficulty, stands stiff, as if he were in pain […]" (*The Little Foxes* Act 2, p.185), and is left in the hands of Addie, one of the black housekeepers to take care of him. Horace is not socially isolated; he is surrounded by his wife, his daughter, his close relatives, and the people who take care of him and his house. All this guarantees the reduction of stress on the caregiver; furthermore, "spreading the caregiving around to several persons, from the point of view of the patients, also increases network ties" (Collins 2008:138). Regina does not kill her husband because she grows tired or irritated with him, but she, driven by her greed and ambition, does take advantage of his illness to commit murder.

It should be considered that Regina's relationship with her husband had been deteriorating for years, Horace even states that "[his] wife has not wanted [him] in bed for […] ten years" (*The Little Foxes* Act 2, p.189). Their marriage does not only seem unhappy, the reader falls under the impression that they hate each other based on their cold interactions, which mostly revolve around the subject of money– until the end of the second act, where this assumption is confirmed:

> REGINA: (*turns, slowly*) You hate to see anybody live now, don't you? You hate to think that I'm going to be alive and have what I want. […] Because you're going to die and you know you're going to die […]
>
> HORACE: […] I'm sick of you, sick of this house, sick of my life here. I'm sick of your brothers and their dirty tricks to make a dime. […] Maybe it's easy for the dying to be honest. But it's not my fault I'm dying. […]
>
> REGINA: (*looks up at him slowly, calmly*). I hope you die. I hope you die soon. (*Smiles*) I'll be waiting for you to die. (*The Little Foxes* Act 2, p.198-199)

In both *Trifles* and *The Children's Hour*, women are portrayed as active participants in their pursuit of freedom through violence. However, Regina Giddens' *inaction* is what causes Horace's death towards the end of the third act while they were alone, having another argument, just when Regina confesses that she had married him for his money. She then expresses how lucky she is – "[she's] always been lucky" (*The Little Foxes* Act 3, p.212) – because he is dying earlier than she expected meanwhile "[Horace] puts his hand to his throat […] turns slowly to the medicine" (*The Little Foxes* Act 3, p.212).

> HORACE: (*[…] REGINA has not moved. She does not move now. He stares at her. Then, suddenly as if he understood, he raises his voice. It is a panic-stricken whisper, too small to be heard outside the room*) Addie! Addie! Come – (*Stops as he hears the softness of his voice. He makes a sudden, furious spring from the chair to the stairs, taking the first few steps as if he were a desperate runner. On the fourth step he slips, gasps, grasps the rail, makes a great effort to reach the landing. When he reaches the landing, he is on his knees. His knees give way, he falls on the landing, out of view. REGINA has not turned during his climb up the stairs. Now she waits a second. Then she goes below the landing, speaks up.*)
>
> REGINA: Horace. Horace. (*When there is no answer, she turns, calls*) Addie! Cal! Come in here. […] He's had an attack. Come up here. (*The Little Foxes* Act 3, p.212-213).

In the 1941 homonymous film adaptation of the play, directed, just like *The Children's Hour,* by William Wyler, Regina's (Bette Davis) exasperation can be foreseen by the spectator from the beginning of the movie, when she shows a face of disgust when Mr Marshall (Russell Hicks) and her brothers toast to the future of "Hubbard *Sons* and Marshall" (, italics mine); demonstrating that she is being left out of their business plan.

From this moment onwards the audience can notice how Davis' portrayal of Regina Giddens is not only driven by her greed, but also by revenge. She does everything she can to make herself indispensable, including neglecting her husband (Herbert Marshall) when he needed help the most and letting him die in order to achieve complete control over their fortune. She then denies sharing the money with her brothers thus ruining their business plan and using it to move to Chicago as she had always wanted to, with no visible consequences. The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 stated that "no picture shall be produced that will lower the moral standards of those who see it" () Just like what happened with Mary Tilford in *The Children's Hour*, none of the characters in *The Little Foxes* face punishment: Regina murdered her husband, Oscar (Carl Benton Reid) beat his wife, Bridie was an alcoholic, and Leo Hubbard (Dan Duryea) stole Horace's bonds from his bank vault encouraged by his father Oscar and his uncle Benjamin Hubbard (Charles Dingle). Only in the 1941 adaptation, with the introduction of the character of David Hewitt (Richard Carlson) as Alexandra's love interest, is Leo punished at the end of the film: David slaps him in the face several times because Leo suggests that he is only spending time with Alexandra and worrying about Horace's health because he has intentions on marrying the rich girl . On the other hand, Horace changing his will to make Alexandra the heir of his fortune instead of his wife can be seen as a punishment for Regina's greed, Oscar even suggests that "it's possible that Horace made up that part about stealing to tease you… or perhaps to punish you" (1:36:30), but she does not face consequences for committing a murder. Horace Hubbard's murder was a display of coldness and hatred on Regina's behalf, a coldness that the film is able to accentuate thanks to Bette Davis' performance and the angle of the shot in which the scene of the argument between Regina and Horace was filmed, allowing the audience to see both the

anger in Regina's eyes and her husband crawling on the background in search for help, choking and crying in vain.

In this play violence represents a form of escape for Regina inasmuch as she felt held back by her husband, a man she considered unambitious and simple; by neglecting him and allowing him to die – that is, by committing a crime – Regina can not only fulfil her dream of living in Chicago and rub shoulders with the high society there, she also manages to take revenge on her brothers that pushed her aside from their plans and escape from a life devoted to a family that tied her to a place and a business in which she could not thrive. However, violence is also what traps Birdie, ironically, it encages her in a harmful relationship very similar to the one Minnie Wright and Margaret Hossack were in before they allegedly killer their respective husbands. Nevertheless, the audience has no way of knowing what Birdie would do to escape that relationship – *if* she ever does anything –, the same way it is impossible to know if Regina was eventually punished. Only Alexandra is able to physically escape without resorting to violence, but by seeing its effects and deciding she did not want to be surrounded by an environment that did not condemn violence; innocent and oblivious at the beginning, Alexandra's discovery of the greediness and ambition of the Hubbard siblings is what pushes her to the decision of leaving her family behind thus escaping from violence instead of using it to escape.

Conclusion

VIOLENCE AS AN ESCAPE FOR WOMEN

Through these pages the definition of violence has been discussed, as well as its different manifestations in three plays written by women in early 20th century in America, *Trifles* (1917), *The Children's Hour* (1934), and *The Little Foxes* (1939). Using Randall Collin's work *Violence. A micro-sociological Theory* as the unifying thread of this work, the concepts of "normal limited conflict", "severe forward panic", and "terroristic torture regime" have been explained and positioned in a spectrum. His depictions of domestic violence, bullying in schools, violence against the disabled, and murder have been explained, as well as Baumeister's ideas of suicide as a form of escape from the self, all of them applied to their respective plays.

It has been identified in which ways violence represents an escape for the female characters of these plays: Minnie Foster uses violence in *Trifles* to get away from an abusive husband and an isolated household; in *The Children's Hour* Martha Dobie commits suicide to escape from the prospect of a lifetime of unhappiness and persecution – not because of unrequited love, as some scholars suggest was the main cause of homosexual suicide –, whereas Mary Tilford's uses violence for more egoistical purposes like stealing money from her roommates and manipulating adults to get what she wants. Lastly, in *The Little Foxes* both domestic violence and violence against the disabled were explored, the former on the hands of Birdie and her husband Oscar Hubbard, who physically abuses her; the latter is seen in the character of Regina Giddens, whose ambition leads her to neglect her husband when he needed help the most thus causing his death.

Furthermore, the film versions of both Hellman's plays were compared to the plays, finding many similarities but also some interesting changes like the way Martha Dobie commits suicide at the end of *The Children's Hour* or how Bette Davis' portrayal of Regina Giddens in the 1941 film adaptation of *The Little Foxes* is more driven by revenge on her brothers and husband than ambition. Upon writing this dissertation I came across a thirty-minute film version of Glaspell's short story "A Jury of Her Peers", unfortunately, I could not find it available in any streaming or physical platform so, sadly, it will not be possible to analyse it. Moreover, both "The Hossack Case" and "The Drumsheugh Case" were explored as source materials for *Trifles* and *The Children's Hour*, respectively, as well as Susan Glaspell's short story "A Jury of her Peers" as a retelling of *Trifles* in a different literary genre.

All in all, the objectives presented in the introduction were achieved: violence has been stablished as a form of escape for the main female characters in the three plays, allowing them to get away from an abusive relationship, to achieve relief, or even to take except for the establishment of patterns in the description and use of violence by both authors and characters. Moreover, other forms of escape for women have been found specially in *The Little Foxes*, Birdie Hubbard managed to evade herself by drinking, whereas Alexandra decided to pack her bags and run away from a violent environment.

The topic of violence is a greatly broad one, and in this dissertation I have only been able to tackle its depiction by white female playwrights due to a limit of space and time, as well as the fact that, as it has been explained in the introduction, to tackle black women theatre would entail a different approach of violence based on racism and the dynamics of black communities. Plays like Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) or Alice Childress' *Trouble in Mind* (1955) or *Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black and White* (1966) present violent situations between black characters, instances

of racism and violence towards women, all elements whose treatment could be compared to that of white female playwrights. Male playwrights' depiction of violence would also be interesting, especially if compared with the way both black and white women treat it, plays like *Mulatto* (1935) by Langston Hughes, Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, or James Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie* are some other examples of plays that explore the topic of violence, not necessarily as a form of escape, but as a necessary element that is present in all fields of everyday life.

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